

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

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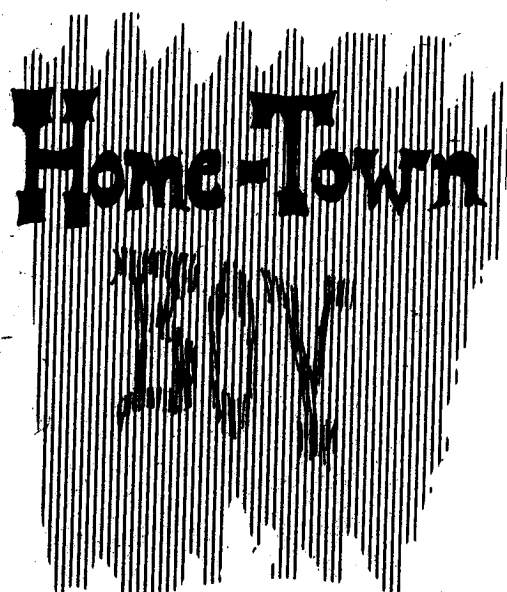
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Few, indeed, are those who would dispute Aristotle that, "Man is by nature a political animal."



man, nearly six-feet-five-inches tall. A snake-like scar ran from his right temple to the bridge of his nose.

Slater tasted his beer. "How did you happen to come to me?"

"I bought people drinks. I lis-



YOU'RE JUST THE MAN for the job," Carson said.

Slater eyed him cautiously. "That right?"

"The whole thing is a setup. Nothing to it."

"If you're so positive about that, why don't you do it yourself?"

Carson showed crooked teeth. "It's my home town. Just look at me. Do you think a mask could hide me from the people who've known me all my life?"

Carson was a heavy-paunched

by
Jack Ritchie

tened to what they had to say, and eventually one of them spoke about you."

"I'm clean," Slater said. "And going straight."

Carson smiled. "Then why are you sitting here in a bar, drinking beer and whiskey? That violates your parole, doesn't it?"

Slater, a small, intense man, finished the rest of his beer and wiped

his lips. "All right. I'll listen. But I promise nothing."

"It's just a small branch bank," Carson said. "A one-story building, and there are only two rooms: the big main room and the manager's office in the back."

"How much money?"

"There's always about twenty thousand in cash."

"How do you know?"

"Once I asked." Carson puffed his cigar. "One-thirty in the afternoon would be just about the best time to hit. The sheriff will be taking his nap then. He's got a cot in the back room of his office."

Slater grinned. "Everybody in town knows that he takes a nap?"

Carson nodded. "The bank is on Main Street. Everything's on Main Street. It's on the right-hand side as you come into town from the west. You can't miss it. It's the only bank in town and Main Street is only four blocks long."

"Who'll I find inside the bank?"

"Just the branch manager—his name's Prescott—and Alice Warner. She's the cashier."

"What about customers?"

"There could be some, but I doubt it. Things are pretty dead in town the early part of the afternoon. You can take Prescott and Alice into the manager's office and tie and gag them. That ought to give you plenty of time to get out

of town. It could be a while before anybody finds them."

"You really got this event cased?"

"Right down to the last button," Carson said. "I've been thinking about it for some time."

Slater rubbed his jaw thoughtfully. "The job's too much for one man to handle. I'll need somebody with me."

Carson agreed. "Can you get anybody?"

"Sure. But that means we split three ways. All even." Slater drummed his fingers on the booth table. "There's just this sleepy sheriff to worry about?"

"Just him, and he'll be taking his nap."

"An old, old man?"

"He's not so old," Carson said, "and it's better not to sell him short. Eleven years ago he killed two convicts who escaped from the state prison. He stopped them at a roadblock just outside of town, and when the shooting was over, both of them were dead."

"I'll bet that made him the hero of the county."

Carson nodded. "But you got nothing to worry about. He's been taking a nap at that same time for years and never missed a day."

"Where do we split the money?"

"I'll meet you right back here on Sunday. About two o'clock." Car-

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son put the cigar butt into the ash tray. "Nothing can go wrong. Nothing at all."

"This is the quietest town east or west of the Rockies," Prescott said.

Miss Warner leafed through canceled checks. "I like it that way."

Prescott stood near the plate-glass windows. "There's the sheriff."

"What's he doing?"

"The usual. Watching the cars pass. There ought to be one along any minute now."

Miss Warner glanced up at the wall clock. "Isn't it his nap time? He's half an hour late."

"I'll bet his watch stopped. He's yawning though." Prescott laughed.

Miss Warner frowned slightly. "Everybody likes him. He's a nice, good man."

"I guess you can say at least that for him." Prescott watched the sheriff cross the street. "He's coming over here now. He's going to come in and say, 'Hot day.' And before he leaves, he's going to ask if he can have a drink from my water cooler. It's part of the routine."

The sheriff pushed his way past the glass door. "Afternoon, Alice. Jim." He took off his broad-brimmed hat and mopped his brow. "Hot day."

Prescott smiled. "That's right, Sheriff."

The sheriff watched a truck rumble by and suppressed another yawn.

"A little late today, Sheriff?" Prescott asked. "Thought you might be getting in your nap about now."

The sheriff glanced at the wall clock and then at his watch. "Dog-gone. She stopped," he said, winding the stem of the watch and setting the hands ahead. He moved toward the door, but then seemed to remember something. "I'm a little thirsty. Do you suppose I could . . . ?"

Prescott grinned. "Sure. Help yourself."

The sheriff ambled to the water cooler in Prescott's office.

Outside, a light-blue sedan pulled up to the curb. Slater and a red-haired man got out. They came through the door with their guns drawn.

In Prescott's office, the sheriff eased the service revolver from its holster and released the safety.

The sheriff was a heavy-paunched man, nearly six-feet-five-inches tall. A snake-like scar ran from his right temple to the bridge of his nose.

Now they'll all have respect for me again. He began firing.